

Remarks at a Nowruz Reception

March 20, 2023

The President. Hello, hello, hello! Welcome to your house.

Thank you, Lieutenant Colonel. I just want one commitment from you: When you head to Mars, you won't take Jill; she'd be gone too long. *[Laughter]* An astronaut, a marine, a mom. A fellow American who will take us to the Moon, Mars, and beyond. That's America. Think about it. That's who we are.

Good afternoon, everyone. As we celebrate new beginnings, Jill and I, along with Kamala and Doug, are honored to host a new national tradition—and I say a "new national tradition"—the first Nowruz reception on this scale ever held in the White House. And you're evidence of it. Excuse me, I have a little bit of a cold.

It's a celebration that's been a millennium in the making, observed by millions of people around the world this very day, and the roots in— ancient Persia. You know, one that was carried on by people and—in the gardens of Shiraz, the mountains of Kabul and Erbil, in the shores of Baku and beyond, most of which I've got a chance to visit—but I got to—get to come home too. *[Laughter]* And one that has always been honored anew by diverse diaspora in communities across the United States, including all of you.

You know, folks, it's the start of a new year that reminds us of hope and what lies ahead from these darkest times so many have been through. And we know that this year's holiday comes at a difficult time for many families. Hope where is needed more than ever is going to be coming. Hope for families in Turkey and Syria, who are grieving for the loss of far too many loved ones from that devastating earthquake. Hope for people in Afghanistan, who continue to struggle with a grave humanitarian crisis. Hope for women of Iran, who are fighting for their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Isn't it amazing how young your daughters or granddaughters are—how they're moved by what they see on television? It's amazing. Thank God it's hard for them to believe. It's hard for them to believe. The United States stands with those brave women and all the citizens of Iran who are inspiring the world with their conviction and, I have to emphasize, their courage, their genuine courage. And together with our partners, we're going to continue to hold Iran—Iranian officials accountable for their attacks against their people.

I also want to recognize two proud Iranian Americans with us today who know better than anyone the power of holding on to hope and the possibility of a new day. Jason—where's Jason? He's back there. And Yeganeh. And there's—and Rezaian.

Look, Jason and—you're both been——

Audience member. In the back.

The President. ——were—you were both unjustly detained in Iran. Jason for 544 days. We worked very hard to bring him home when I was Vice President. Thank you for—both for being here today. And to all those who are unjustly detained in Iran or anywhere in the world, know that you are not forgotten, and we will not try and—stop trying to get you home.

Returning wrongfully detained and people held hostage—and particularly Americans and their families—is a top priority for this administration. And I'm very glad to say that, just today, an American aid worker, Jeff Woodke—Jeff Woodke—has been released after spending 6 years

hostage by a terrorist group in West Africa. He'll soon be returned with his wife and family. And we'll continue our work to bring home all Americans held hostage or unjustly detained.

You know, the—in the 14th century, the Persian poet Hasef—Hafez—excuse me—said: "Out of the great need, we are holding hands and climbing." Out of the great need, we are holding hands and climbing.

All around the world, wherever we need—the need is great, this holiday offers a moment to reach out—reach out and, together, to begin to climb toward a new day, one full of hope and new possibilities. I thank all of you. You've continued to spread the hope for this holiday across every part our own country.

We see it in the homemade pastries and new presents exchanged. We hear it in the sound of children banging pots and the laughs of families who've come together. And we feel it in the communities that gather to make this celebration such a joyous part of American culture, one that reflects the soul of who we are as a nation.

You know, it's a soul that we also see reflected at this Haft-Sin—Haft-Sin—and I'm—*[laughter]*—I'm tempted to walk over. Anyway. *[Laughter]*

The sprouts that remind us, though, that we can always begin anew. The vinegar that symbolizes the power of tolerance. The apple that inspires us to believe in a more beautiful and healthy future. And even the table itself: a place where we gather in unity; a place where young and old come together to honor the past and the present; a place where we may disagree and debate, but we always—always there's a seat for everyone. That's America at our best: resilient, tolerant, courageous, hopeful, diverse. That's who we are.

We're the only nation in the world built on an idea. Every other nation—that's not hyperbole. Every other nation is based on things like geography, ethnicity, religion. But we're the only nation built on an idea that "we hold these truths to be self-evident," that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, et cetera.

We've never fully lived up to it, but we've never, ever walked away from it. And that's due in large part to the waves of immigrant families who have come from every part of the world to push our Nation ever forward, renewing and reinvigorating our Nation generation after generation after generation.

We see that today in this very room. Maybe you or your parents or grandparents came to America, uncertain of what life would bring, but certain you and your children and grandchildren would be able to do anything you wanted to do here, try it.

You've grown up seeing your children forged by their heritage, but also the kinds of friendships found every day in American things—soccer practice, band practice—just those special times, and all the things that make an extraordinary life in our generation—in our great Nation.

And thanks to all of you for enriching the soul of this Nation. Thank you for adapting old traditions anew to tell the ongoing story of America, one firmly stamped by your experiences.

Let me close with this. Few periods have been more challenging to our world than the one we're going through right now. And we face an inflection point. I had a professor who said: "An inflection point is when you're going down the highway at 65 miles an hour and you radically turn 5 degrees to the right. You can never get back on the course you were on." Well, recent decisions—points—the decisions we make today are going to determine the course of our future for the next several decades to come.

Now more than ever, we need you—we need you—engaged in the work of our time to help fulfill the promise of this Nation, the same promise of opportunity, equality that brought you and your families here in the first place. That's what I hope for this very day: to celebrate and connect, to feel the pride of community, to keep the faith in our country. "Out of a great need, we're all holding hands and climbing." We have to keep climbing.

I've never been more optimistic in my life about the future of this country. And I mean that sincerely.

Let's remember who in God's name we are. We are the United States of America. And there is nothing—I mean this from the bottom of my heart: There is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we do it together.

Happy Nowruz to all of you and your families——

Audience member. Happy Nowruz.

The President. ——and may God bless you all.

Before the reception begins, we have a special performance for you—a special performance for you. So I'm going to—we're going to get off the stage here and let you be truly entertained. *[Laughter]*

Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[At this point, musician Sahba Motallebi performed "Birth," and musician Rana Mansour performed "For Woman, Life, Liberty." Following the performances, the President spoke as follows.]

The President. Well, thank you both so very, very much. You're incredible. You're incredible. Folks, you know, the Persian culture is amazing. As a student of the Persian culture—not a practitioner, but a student—it's incredible where the world is, where the world wouldn't have been without—without the culture. I really mean it.

If you'll excuse me for quoting a non-Persian poet—*[laughter]*—that relates to today—because I know the hope in all your hearts, your desire—I mean, it's real. You can feel it in this room, just the looks on your faces, those of you who still have folks back there.

Well, other people who have been persecuted as well have had poets that talk about their future. One of my favorite poets happens to be an Irishman named Seamus Heaney, and Heaney wrote a poem called "The Cure at Troy." And there's a stanza in the poem that I think reflects what all of you are thinking, should be thinking, and will succeed in doing. He said:

History [teaches us not to] hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
[That] longed-for tidal wave
Of justice [rises] up,
And hope and history rhyme.

It's my sincere hope we're doing everything in our power—everything in our power—to make that happen. It's an incredible, incredible culture. Incredible people.

And thank you for being here. Thank you for making this day known to all Americans, because everybody watched this. Thank you, thank you, thank you for all you've done. And thank you for the incredible talent you sent. *[Laughter]* You're amazing.

Did you want to say anything, babe? You want to say anything?

The First Lady. Just please go and join the reception. Thank you. Thank you for coming to the White House.

The President. You're amazing! Remember who you are.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:13 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Col. Jasmin Moghbeli, USMC, commander, NASA SpaceX Crew-7 mission to the International Space Station, who introduced the President; Vice President Kamala D. Harris and her husband, Douglas C. Emhoff; Jason Rezaian, reporter, Washington Post, who was released from detention in Iran in January 2016, and his wife Yeganeh Rezaian; and Els Woodke, wife of Mr. Woodke. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady and Lt. Col. Moghbeli.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Nowruz reception.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Mansour, Rana; Moghbeli, Jasmin; Motallebi, Sahba; Rezaian, Jason; Rezaian, Yeganeh; Woodke, Els; Woodke, Jeffery.

Subjects: Afghanistan, humanitarian crisis; Immigration; Iran, human rights issues; Iran, release of U.S. citizen from captivity; Nowruz, observance; Syria, earthquake damage and recovery efforts; Turkey, earthquake damage and recovery efforts; Vice President; West Africa, release of U.S. citizen from captivity.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300207.